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Effective Communication in the Project IRIS



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Introduction

All organizations whether large or small, commercial, government, charities, educational and other not-for-profit organizations have the responsibility to communicate with a range of stakeholders (Ihlen 2013). Traditionally, there are five communication tools: advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations and direct marketing (Smith & Zook, 2011). Increasingly, digital media and the Internet in particular, are used to communicate with stakeholders.

The objective of the project Introducing Reverse Innovation in Higher Education Institutes in Tanzania (IRIS) is to develop active pedagogy and create new cooperation in the HEI context, introduce new partnerships and disseminate the pedagogy model widely to a variety of stakeholders. Therefore, the IRIS project emphasizes the importance of effective communications in increasing awareness and engagement to its stakeholders.

IRIS communications objectives

Communication is an essential activity and indicator in the IRIS project. In addition, communication is one of the key activities ensuring the project sustainability, rooting and general dissemination in the Tanzanian higher education context. The main objective of IRIS communications is to reach new working life partners for co-operation, disseminate and root the IRIS project results and inspire the community to co-operate with universities enabling co-creation processes.

One of the main goals of IRIS is to increase **active dialogue and concrete collaboration between different sectors in society**. There are several beneficiaries and stakeholders connected to the project in its different stages. The three main stakeholders are micro-entrepreneurs from the local community, Higher Education Institutions (HEI)

and library and information professionals. The cooperation of the three main stakeholders creates the core of the IRIS project objective. In addition, main beneficiaries are students, other working life representatives, NGOs, libraries, government authorities, innovation hubs and many more. Active communications with this variety of stakeholders is crucial for the project success.

IRIS utilized a mix of active communication methods to engage with its stakeholders. Different channels and methods were chosen according to the target audience to maximize the dissemination impact to each stakeholder group. Considering the ease of use, reliability, convenience, and the ability of the channel to document communications were all taken into consideration (Snyder & Eng Lee-Partridge 2013). Strategies were determined as internal and external, with a main event for the project, Tanzanian Innovation Pedagogy Event (TIPE) and a final publication.

Internal communication has been traditionally considered as the only channel for management decisions, but instead it should be seen as mechanism for faster change, more flexibility and innovation, better quality decisions, better knowledge sharing and a more motivated workforce (Quirke, 2017). The main internal communication methods were face-to-face meetings and workshops, video conference, phone, WhatsApp and email. The project team also shared a co-working space online, where documents and reports could be developed and shared in real time. As IRIS partners were located in different countries, each partner organization had their additional internal communication activities. These included regular face-to-face meetings, phone, Skype for Business and WhatsApp.

The aim of the internal communication activities was to maintain the project progressing effectively and to ensure team members were involved, informed and included. The selection of suitable channels kept all project team members up to date of activities, involved in planning processes, shared information and enabled effective decision making.

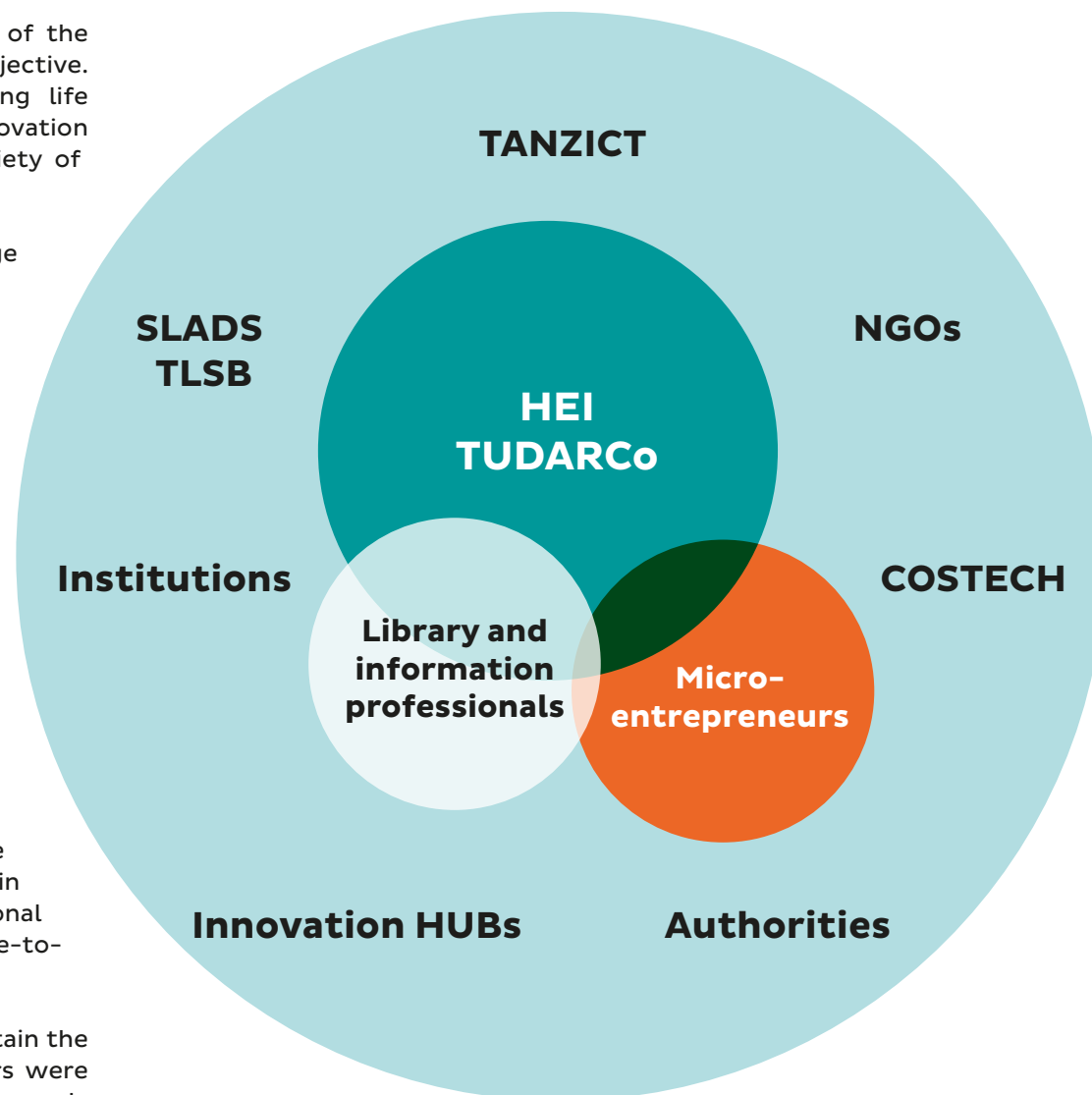


Figure 1. IRIS project stakeholder map (IRIS project application, 2017)

External communications strategies included more channels and activities to ensure the involvement and reach of several stakeholder groups. It has been stated that multimedia features like photos and videos contribute to the success of communication (Hofmann et al., 2013). Therefore, IRIS' main digital communication channels were a public website and Facebook page, to maximize the appealing elements. The IRIS website included a blog, news, partners' and team members' introductions and an event calendar. The aim of these channels was to reach the wide audience, co-operative partners, authorities and other HEIs.

In addition, the IRIS project had an Instagram page that was mainly targeted at students to share their moments and experiences in the IRIS project. Instagram was a good channel to share picture material from a wider audience. Participants, the IRIS team members, students and staff were often encouraged to share photos on their social media networks by using the IRIS or funder's hashtags or alternatively sharing pictures and greetings to persons responsible for TUAS and TUDARCo communications to take forward. The steady encouragement to communicate actively has led to active communication channels and to an increase in engagement and involvement with the audiences.

External communication also included different stand-up presentations, presences. Also separately, regular communication was done towards funder authorities in Finland. A major external communications effort was a major event on the second year of the project under the name TIPE (TUDARCo Innovation Pedagogy Event).

The history of the TIPE name is that TUDARCo and TUAS, in collaboration through the IRIS Project, designed the innovation pedagogy model to the Tanzanian context. The idea of innovation pedagogy of TUDARCo is to activate Higher Education Institutions to collaborate with local communities, companies, private and public sector, NGOs and government authorities. The basis of the idea is active learning and teaching methods where real working life is connected to the higher education studies, enabling collaboration across sectors already during the student's studies. This collaboration enables the generation of young students and innovators to meet the local actors' needs and

ensures local development, employability and tighter connections between communities in Tanzania.

The TIBE objective was to showcase the IRIS project's learning outcomes and experiences that have been gained from the project collaborations as well as to develop networks and identify possible areas of new, future collaboration. The main organizers of the TIBE event were the IRIS team members and students from both project partner universities, TUAS and TUDARCo.

The TIPE event was designed to take place on two separate occasions, the first one as an independent side event and the second one as a collaboration event together with Dar es Salaam Innovation Week 2019.

The TIPE event collaborated with the biggest innovation event taking place in Tanzania annually. TIPE had an opportunity to network with other creative and innovative companies and entities that are improving the lives of many Tanzanians in the area of education and entrepreneurship. In March 2019, TIPE hosted its first event in collaboration with Human Development Innovation Fund (HDIF) during the INNOVATION WEEK 2019 (IW2019). IW2019 is a series of events, curated by the Human Development Innovation Fund (HDIF) and the Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) with support from UKaid that brings together players in the Tanzania innovation ecosystem to share their insights on social innovation with stakeholders from across Tanzania. Moreover, Innovation Week provides a platform for innovators to showcase their work, identify areas of collaboration, and meet potential partners. The event takes place yearly at Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH), an organization that coordinates and promotes research and technology development activities in the country. IW2019 took place from 25th March to 29th March 2019 under the theme Scaling and Sustaining Innovation for Human Development.

More than 100 companies and institutions applied to participate as partners and only 50 organizations were selected to participate as exhibitors or partners. The event partners were individuals and organizations from various sectors, who volunteer to share insights

on innovation in their field of expertise to audiences and collaborators from across sectors. The IRIS Project applied and presented its innovation pedagogy through the sub-theme of “Scaling and Sustaining Innovations in Education”.

The second session of TIPE was its independent side event, which was organized independently by the IRIS team and both TUAS and TUDARCo students. The side event was held at Tanzania Library Board Services (TLBS), Dar es Salaam. The event was targeted mainly at academic institutions, researchers, policy makers, government authorities and NGOs. In addition, some companies and startups also participated in the event. Up to 60 people from different sectors attended the TIPE side event.

In the event, IRIS presented three papers focusing on the three main areas of the project i.e. Entrepreneurship, Active Innovation Pedagogy and Library and Information Services. The presentations highlighted the benefits of the project to the micro-entrepreneurs, the importance of libraries as important centres of information for micro-entrepreneurs and the benefit of the active pedagogy to high learning institutions. People from other academic institutions were invited to join the panel discussions and share their insight on the TUDARCo Innovation Pedagogy Model. Students from TUDARCo and other academic institutions were also invited to share their learning experiences. Overall, the audience was highly inspired by the IRIS project's results. During discussions the audiences suggested concrete and realistic solutions that will increase interaction and collaboration between communities and higher education institutes. One example was the active use of social media platforms to inform and connect with the local community members.

IRIS used broadcast and print media occasionally, especially during kick off meetings, launching events and the main event TIPE. These media have been integrated with digital media communications with an objective to reach even wider and different segments of audience. Additionally, the IRIS results have been communicated actively through TUDARCo promotional campaigns.

Tipe results and experiences

The Innovation Week 2019 event offered a great platform to present IRIS results. More than 2000 people from different sectors attended the event. The

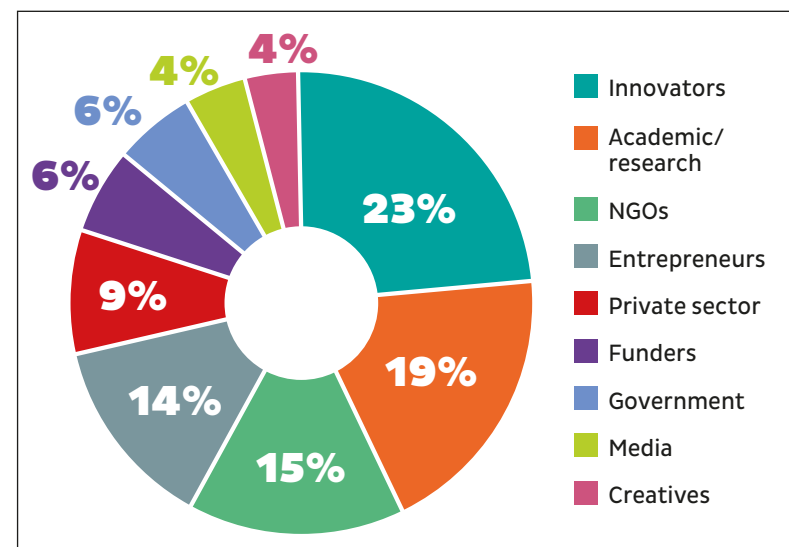


Figure 2. Breakdown of Innovation Week participant profiles (HDIF 2019)

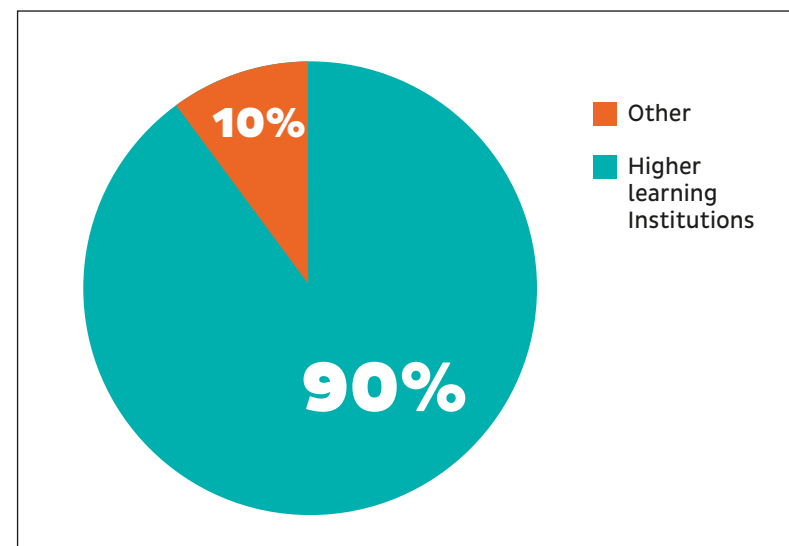


Figure 3. TIPE Side Event attendees.



Picture 1. IRIS Kick off on Channel 10 (IRIS, Kick off meeting 2017).)

IRIS team had an opportunity to be present in two different ways during the Innovation Week 2019. One was a presentation at the event and the other one was an exhibition stand. Up to 30 TUDARCo students played a key role to showcase and share the true experience of the model to more than 200 people who visited the stand in the very central place in the COSTECH venue. Some of the results showcased during the event were an information service desk, micro-entrepreneurs' videos representing results and benefits of collaboration and involvement of micro-entrepreneurs and the active pedagogy. All visitors who visited the IRIS stand were impressed with the IRIS project outcome, according to the verbal feedback received. The innovation week was a unique opportunity for IRIS to encounter so many different people, and to introduce and collect responses of TUDARCo's innovation pedagogy model. Besides the audience, media and some institutions were very interested in the new pedagogy model and invited the project representatives to participate in various conferences, seminars and other events.

During Innovation Week, the HDIF invited the IRIS team to participate in a hub tour with their innovation partners who were interested to see the IRIS project in action. IRIS had an opportunity to pitch their innovation idea to representatives from the Swedish embassy, the Swiss embassy, European Union delegation, United Nation Development Programme and World Food Programme.

Moreover, the week was an active learning platform not only for the project team members but also for TUDARCo's students who played a key role in the exhibition.

IRIS had an opportunity to meet different companies who were participating in the Innovation Week and were interested in the active pedagogy model and as a result, new collaborations were formed. One example is ESS CREATIVE AND LEGAL FOUNDATION which invited TUDARCo students to promote their insurance services. Another example is Sahara Ventures, a company that promotes innovation ecosystems and acts as a startup incubator in Tanzania. The CEO of Sahara Ventures, Mr. Jumanne Mtambalike, was one of the keynote speakers during the TIPE side event. Mtambalike is an expert in innovation hubs management. Since the event, the IRIS team has been working very closely with Mr. Mtambalike to develop a concept on how to start up an innovation hub at TUDARCo.

TIPE had an opportunity to be one of the 77 partners to host an event as part of Innovation Week 2019. The event was covered by reputable media houses and it was communicated all over social media platforms. Being part of the official partners enabled the IRIS project communications also to reach a new level of media coverage.

IRIS received a lot of inputs from both events and today the elements of the active pedagogy are successfully incorporated in the TUDARCo curriculum. One of the IRIS project's key achievements is that the curriculum was accredited in May 2019 by the regulators of higher learning institutions. The accreditation process is not easy or common, but the IRIS project achieved something special thanks to the amazing team, great activities, results and successful communication activities.

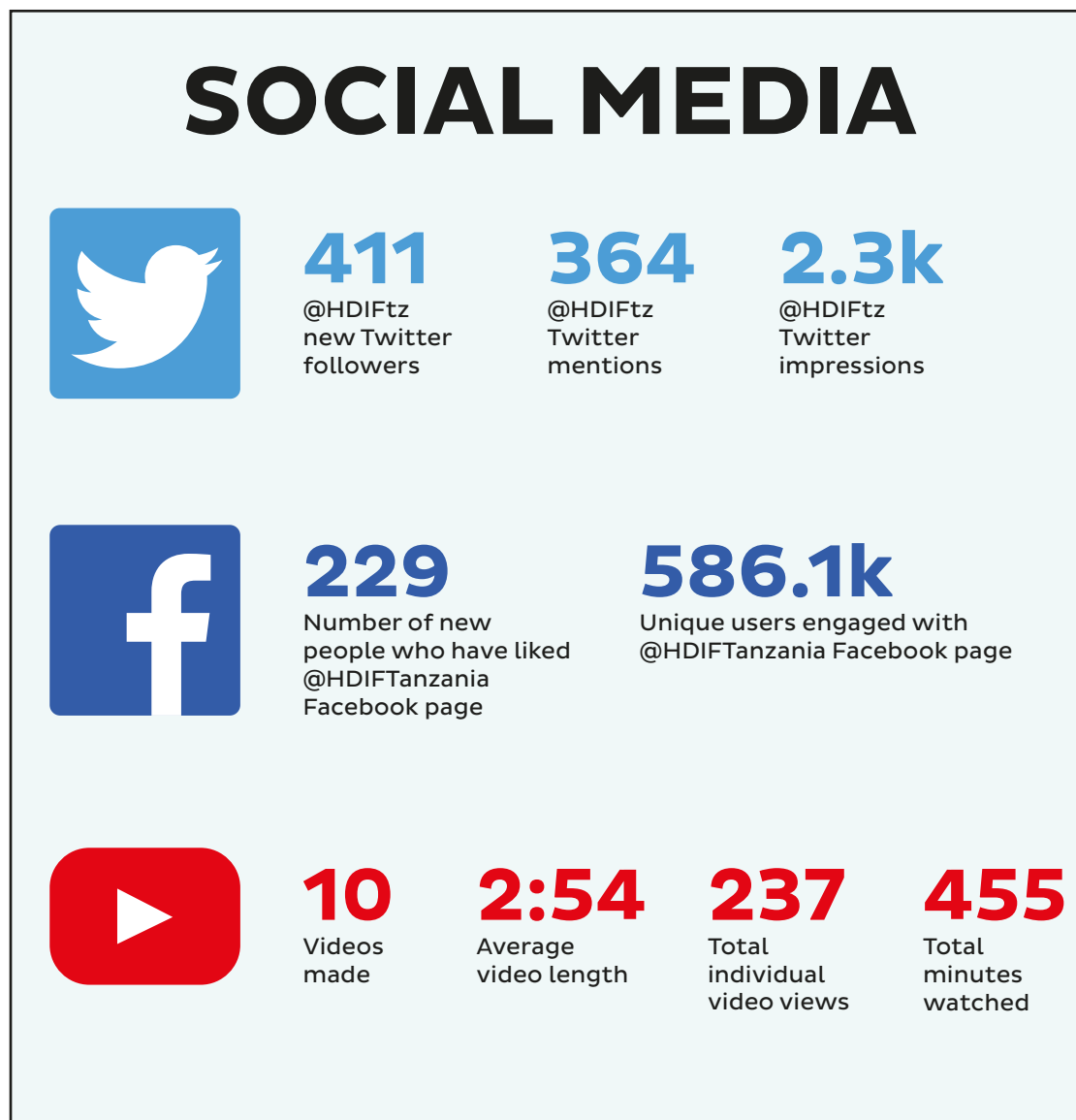


Figure 5. Social media coverage (HDIF 2019)



Figure 6. Innovation week media coverage (HDIF 2019)

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